



Chapter eleven: Embedding Education for Sustainable Development



Priority actions for the UK Government: Education



1 Embed sustainability...

Embed Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) across all types of education and at all levels, from primary school through to the workforce, with a focus on solutions.



2 fill the skills gap...

Fill the UK's green skills gap to produce a knowledgeable, skilled and motivated green workforce.



3 join-up disciplines...

Develop an interdisciplinary and joined-up education system without compromising on specialist education.



4 bring in the right people...

Work with the environment sector to increase access to green jobs and wider awareness of different pathways into the sector.



5 ...and teach by example.

Use the DfE's own sustainability actions to teach by example, driving 'situated learning' about the environment.

“Education has a fundamental power: to shape the lives of future generations and rebuild our relationship with nature.”

Education is a crucial tool to deliver our sustainable future.

What we learn shapes how we view the world around us, so unsustainable perspectives embedded through education can lead to unsustainable approaches to the environment.

Beyond helping us to understand science and the natural world, education also has many practical consequences for society and the environment: it determines what skills the workforce has, shapes the jobs that people do, and defines the values that people use to make decisions.

Transforming the workforce and providing the skills necessary for green jobs is critical to achieving sustainable development and a just climate transition.

The sustainable education agenda has seen some progress, for instance:

- the QAA and Advance HE [Guidance on Education for Sustainable Development](#)
- The Department for Education’s (DfE) [Sustainability and Climate Strategy](#)
- the [Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice](#)

Despite the scale of change required, education has a fundamental power: to shape the lives of future generations, position the UK as a leader in the green industrial revolution, and repair our relationship with nature.

By building capacity for ESD and green skills, we can empower young people to become change agents in their communities and throughout their careers.

Box 10. About the Community for Environmental Disciplines in Higher Education

The **Community for Environmental Disciplines in Higher Education** (CEDHE) represents and provides leadership to the environmental education communities. CEDHE works to ensure young people from all backgrounds are inspired to begin and sustain an environmental education, from primary to postgraduate.

CEDHE are an active networking organisation enhancing the quality of outcomes for education institutions teaching environmental disciplines.

They facilitate connections between members and develop new avenues of international co-operation within the environmental science community.

1. **Embed Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) across all types of education and at all levels, from primary school through to the workforce, with a focus on solutions.**

- i. Include an element of ESD in all education pathways and routes into the workforce, endorsing toolkits and guidance to help educators translate it into practical steps and teaching resources.
- ii. Deliver, increase, and amplify commitments in the DfE's **Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy**, including taking more proactive steps to align climate education with ESD.
- iii. Update the secondary curriculum to better engage young people with value-based climate citizenship, empowering them to become change agents in their communities and in their future careers.

This aligns with the ambition in the Government's **manifesto commitment** to **“build an education system that prepares our children for life, work, and the future.”**

As environmental challenges like climate change become increasingly relevant to everyday life, education should prepare people to recognise and address those challenges.

2. Fill the UK's green skills gap to produce a knowledgeable, skilled and motivated green workforce.

- i. Develop a strategy for achieving an environmentally-literate workforce with widespread access to resources on critical scientific topics, including systems thinking, sustainable futures, **Carbon Literacy** and process literacy, with unambiguous support for accurate climate science.
- ii. Support key sectors to produce skills audits and transition plans, outlining how they will deliver technical skills, deep climate skills, digital skills, and enabling skills such as communication and public engagement, and setting out how these skills will align with the current and future green jobs market.
- iii. Deliver the UK's ambition for two million green jobs by 2030 through increased investment in careers in environmental science, the circular economy, water resource management, land management, and environmental research.

This will deliver the **Government's objective** to create **"A new Britain ... where children are equipped with the skills to thrive in the future"** and will be crucial to the success of the Government's mission to **'make Britain a clean energy superpower.'**

This supports the Government's **ambition in its manifesto** to **"establish Skills England ... [and] ensure we have the highly trained workforce needed to deliver Labour's Industrial Strategy."**

3. Develop an interdisciplinary and joined-up education system without compromising on specialist education.

- i. Facilitate links across disciplines by encouraging increased connections and removing barriers between departments and institutions in higher education, including between STEM, **SHAPE**, and other relevant disciplines.
- ii. Work with the HE sector to redesign curricula with sustainability in mind, retaining the beneficial ways that courses and programmes can drive specialisation, while promoting opportunities for multidisciplinary learning.

This would realise the **Government's comment** that **"there is huge potential for growth in the creative industries that benefit every corner of the UK"** and deliver its commitment to **"take a sectoral approach [to industrial strategy] and ... back what makes Britain great: our excellent research institutions, professional services, advanced manufacturing, and creative industries"**, forging productive links between science and the arts.

4. Work with the environment sector to increase access to green jobs and wider awareness of different pathways into the sector.

- i. Take a 'whole education system' approach to helping people access green jobs, including support for the development of modern competency frameworks and technical pathways.
- ii. Support efforts by the private and voluntary sectors to increase equity, diversity, and inclusion in the environmental workforce, using the Government's power to convene partners and address specific structural barriers to inclusion through policy.
- iii. Facilitate engagement with green jobs from primary school onwards, increasing awareness of sustainable careers and specific routes into the sector.

This aligns with the **Government's ambition** that the Mission to 'Make Britain a clean energy superpower' will "create 650,000 jobs across the country by 2030."

5. Use the DfE's own sustainability actions to teach by example, driving 'situated learning' about the environment.

- i. Take a more ambitious approach to reaching net zero in the education system earlier than 2050: address efficiency of the education estate by 2030, take a whole value chain approach to sustainable procurement, and prioritise adapting existing building stock rather than new construction.
- ii. Support situated learning in schools to teach sustainability by example. Promote access to good quality, biodiverse nature within school grounds and local areas, including by delivering on the original ambition of the **National Education Nature Park**. Urgently introduce the promised Natural History GCSE and support its uptake in all schools.
- iii. Review climate action plans for every education setting to ensure they are clear and accountable, with full details on how sustainability commitments will be delivered, referencing explicit targets and science-based actions.
- iv. Issue government guidance and use the DfE's Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy to lay the foundations for common reporting standards across the education sector, working with providers to encourage adoption.

These recommendations realise the **Government's election promise** that **"our children and grandchildren deserve to be astounded by the magnificence of our landscapes and coastlines"**, providing access to nature in a way that also creates a better environment for learning, addresses energy and waste bills from the education estate, and increases wellbeing for young people.

This aligns with the Government's overall **approach to accountability** in schools, applying the statement that **"accountability is non-negotiable, which is why Labour supports school inspection"** to the sustainability and climate commitments made by education settings.